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## <sup>108</sup> Group wants First Avenue named 'Great Place'

Request seeks help  
with beneficial design

**By Rick Smith**

The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — A group of "citizens committed to a better First Avenue" has submitted a request to the state of Iowa to be named one of three "Great Places" in 2006.

The First Avenue group's pursuit of a Great Place designation grows out of its recent objections to the city's proposal to widen First Avenue East from 19th to 40th streets from five to seven lanes.

Sufficiently persuasive has the protest been that Streets Commissioner Don Thomas has removed the concept of "widening" from the First Avenue East plans.

In fact, Thomas has signed on to the group's interest in using design principles to make improvements on First Avenue that take into consid-

eration aesthetics, landscaping and neighborhoods as much as safety and traffic flow.

Joy Ochs of 153 25th St. Dr. SE, one of the group members seeking the Great Places recognition, said last week the group's application will ask the state to help Cedar Rapids use the design approach called "context sensitive solutions" to turn First Avenue East into a "showcase of an urban Main Street."

The approach is apt to include boulevard trees and, perhaps, traffic-control roundabouts at intersections, Ochs said.

Ochs said the group's Great Places application also envisions bringing a consultant to Cedar Rapids to help the community adopt a long-term commitment to project design.

The hope is one day to be able to hold up First Avenue East as a "nationwide model

for forward-thinking street design," she said.

The Great Places concept is an initiative of Gov. Tom Vilsack and is designed to bring the resources of the state to bear to help make a place more special.

The \$8.8 million First Avenue East improvement project already is positioned to receive federal funds to pay for much of the work.

Ochs noted that Commissioner Thomas, Brucemore, the Cedar Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce and 1000 Friends of Iowa all have signed on to the First Avenue initiative.

Thomas said he now believes a new design approach that improves certain intersections and limits left turns elsewhere on First Avenue East will permit more vehicles to operate safely on the street.

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